

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 02999 192106Z

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 192031Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7899

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE ASUNCION 2999

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PA

SUBJ: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ENDORSES CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
PROLONGING STROESSNER RULE

REF: ASUNCION 2535

1. ON JULY 16, A SPECIAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CALLED TO CONSIDER AMENDING THE 1967 CONSTITUTION OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSED ELIMINATING THE TWO-TERM LIMITATION ON THE RULE OF PRESIDENT ALFREDO STROESSNER. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, COMPOSED OF BOTH HOUSES OF THE LEGISLATURE PLUS LEADERS OF OTHER MAJOR GOVERNMENT NON-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, BEGAN DELIBERATIONS ON JULY 8 IN RESPONSE TO A LOWER HOUSE RESOLUTION IN MID-JUNE CALLING FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO PERMIT STROESSNER'S REELECTION IN 1978. (SEE REF. TEL.)

2. AS THE RULING COLORADO PARTY ENJOYED A LARGE MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE OUTCOME WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, WITH 80 VOTES REGISTERED IN FAVOR OF THE AMENDMENT AND 17 AGAINST. NEVERTHELESS, DEBATE (SPANNING SEVERAL DAYS) WAS
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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 02999 192106Z

LIVELY AND NOT CONFINED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE QUESTION

AT HAND. THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN ATTACKED ALLEGED MISTAKES BY THE OPPOSITION IN THE PAST, SUCH AS FAILING TO SECURE GREATER ADVANTAGES FOR PARAGUAY OUT OF THE CACO WAR. THE OPPOSITION (BOTH LIBERALS AND RADICAL LIBERALS) TOOK FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY ON A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY THE PRESENT REGIME. ALL WAS REPORTED IN DETAIL IN THE DAILY PRESS.

3. IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL GROUND RULES THERE WAS NO DIRECT CRITICISM OF STROESSNER, BUT THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT WHOM THE RADICAL LIBERALS HAD IN MIND WHEN THEIR WEEKLY QTE EL RADICAL UNQTE RAN A LARGE FRONT-PAGE PHOTOGRAPH OF IDI AMIN WITH THE CAPTION QTE PRESIDENT FOR LIFE. UNQTE

4. THE NEXT STEP TO COMPLETE THE CUMBERSOME AMENDMENT PROCESS IS THE CONVOCAION OF A POPULARLY ELECTED CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WHICH MUST TAKE PLACE WITHIN SIX MONTHS FOLLOWING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. BOTH THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND STROESSNER'S RE-ELECTION IN 1978 ARE A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY, BARRING HIS DEATH OR DISABLING ILLNESS. (PRESIDENT STROESSNER IS NOW 63 YEARS OLD AND REPORTEDLY IN EXCELLENT HEALTH.) BRIGGS

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